

Západo česká univerzita v Plzni

Fakulta pedagogická

Bakalářská práce

SOCIÁLNÍ KRITIKA V DÍLE CHARLESE DICKENSE

Eliška Petříková

University of West Bohemia

Faculty of Education

Undergraduate Thesis
SOCIAL CRITICISM IN THE NOVELS
OF CHARLES DICKENS

Eli-ka Pet íková

Tato stránka bude ve svázané práci Vá–p vodní formulá *Zadáni bak. práce*
(k vyzvednutí u sekretá ky KAN)

Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

Plzeň, 23. dubna 2013

.....
vlastnoruční podpis

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor, Doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D., for all the valuable advice and time spent on inspection of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

Petřková, Eliška. University of West Bohemia. June, 2013. Social Criticism in the Novels of Charles Dickens. Supervisor: Doc. Justin Quinn, Ph.D.

This thesis deals with Charles Dickens's concern with social issues of the Victorian era. It analyzes several of his novels from the point of view of social criticism and explains some of his beliefs and ideas in relation to them, mainly *David Copperfield*, *American Notes for General Circulation*, *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol*, *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Hard Times*.

The first chapter provides information about Dickens in the context of social criticism and the ideas based on the latest biography by Claire Tomalin.

The second chapter follows his interest in the treatment of children, child labour and the relationship between children and stepparents, as well as the problem of street women and his other women characters and how Victorian society viewed them.

The third chapter pursues his travels in America and his observations from American prisons, asylums and educational institutions, and looks at his opinion of slavery.

The last chapter is concerned with poverty and the changes that occurred in the society and working conditions during and after the Industrial Revolution, and his conclusions about both individuals and the whole society.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
1 THE GREAT WRITER.....	2
2 TREATMENT OF CHILDREN.....	8
3 AMERICAN IMPRESSIONS.....	15
4 CALLING FOR A CHANGE.....	24
CONCLUSION.....	31
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	32
SUMMARY IN CZECH.....	34

INTRODUCTION

Charles Dickens' concern about social matters was so extensive that it deeply formed all his novels. He lived in the Victorian era when the working conditions of the lower class were difficult, when diseases spread through filthy streets of cities, when there was dishonest administration in poor educational institutions and when children were treated badly. Thus, he dedicated his whole life to writing about these problems.

The topic of Dickens' social criticism is so important that it has been dealt with many times before. This thesis focuses on his experience of these problems and the way they changed him and his writing. The thesis analyzes all the problems mentioned above using quotations from his novels, especially *David Copperfield*, *American Notes for General Circulation*, *The Adventures of Oliver Twist*, *A Christmas Carol* and *Hard Times*. Each of these novels is different from the previous ones in some new way.

The first chapter provides information about Dickens in the context of social criticism and the ideas based on the latest biography by Claire Tomalin. The second chapter follows his interest in the treatment of children, child labour and the relationship between children and stepparents, as well as the problem of street women and his other women characters and how Victorian society viewed them. The third chapter pursues his travels in America and his observations from American prisons, asylums and educational institutions, and looks at his opinion of slavery. The last chapter is concerned with poverty and the changes that occurred in the society and working conditions during and after the Industrial Revolution, and his conclusions about both individuals and the whole society.

1 THE GREAT WRITER

In this chapter I would like to introduce Charles Dickens's thinking of the society of his times and his will to draw the attention to some of its problems. He is rightfully given credit for creating the modern Social Novel, which he used as a medium to communicate with people.

Dickens is generally acknowledged to be the greatest novelist of the Victorian period but he came from a troubled background. His father, a Navy officer who fought in the war against France in 1807, is one of the most mysterious figures in Dickens's background. According to the evidence, he was the biggest influence on Dickens's work and style of writing. Just like his son, John Dickens loved culture and reading books, and he spent a lot of money on them. Due to his consequent debts, he was even arrested and lived in a prison for debtors, which gave his son Charles a chance to visit him there several times and to add another setting to his repertoire (Tomalin 4).

Like other novelists of the time he published his work in installments, and these found their way to the hearts of common people, allowing people to identify with the characters. It was cheaper to read serialized novels than the complete publications. People could feel his empathy through the life stories of his characters, which they could understand better than the members of higher social classes. There were other writers who drew attention to similar problems as Dickens did, such as William Makepeace Thackeray, but none of them were nearly as successful as he was.

In order to allow his readers to identify with his characters even deeper, he wrote *David Copperfield* in the first-person. It was only two years after the publication of the novel *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Brontë, which is about a young woman who was abused by the guardians at school. Nevertheless, based on all his known correspondence and references in his novels, both subtle and obvious, he never read *Jane Eyre*. It was his friend John Forster who

suggested that he could try using the first-person narrative and who probably have read Brontë's novel, and because he never saw her novel, his style of writing is completely different, not copied or adjusted to hers (Tomalin 218). While she uses angry and passionate tone of voice when comes to the passages related to abuse, Dickens's tone is more sorrowful and elegiac, and even though Oliver or Nell are perfectly created characters, David is definitely more alive. Dickens also used first-person narrative in *Great Expectations*, and thanks to that Pip belongs to his most plausible characters as well.

He is able to use fictional characters placed in real settings that he got to know during his life in order to draw the attention to social problems he experienced.

His critic W.W.Crotch described that Dickens's characters are determined by the environment without the actual chance for a change during the book, provided that they already have inherent inclinations to be either good or evil: "He held that the fault of their condition lay not in them, but in bad laws, defective social arrangements, inefficient administration and general neglect. In short they were the creatures of their environment" (Crotch 121-122). George Orwell was convinced that the characters never learn from their mistakes and that they are always on the same level of thinking without any progress, including the moral beliefs and behavior (167). However, E.W Knight stated that "this concept of a fixed moral nature, or the character's given identity, is the basis of much nineteenth-century fiction", so it is not only Dickens's privilege (McCarthy 10).

Another critic, John Forster, also a journalist and historian, saw Dickens for the first time when he was performing the acting role in the opera *The Village Coquettes* that he wrote a libretto to. The crowd was so enthusiastic about his performance that they did not notice how bad the opera actually was. Only in Forster's review, criticism of the opera appeared, along with the expressing of disappointing feelings about the opera which was according to his own words not worthy such a great author such as Boz. He was the first one who did not hesitate to

criticize him, which also led to a life-long friendship between the two of them and Forster even had the honor to be Dickens's first biography. They both believed that art can be used to attack injustice and to value the lowest members of society and together they visited some prisons and asylums (Tomalin 81).

Dickens loved to observe the behavior of people around him no matter the locality he currently found himself. He experienced the world differently from others. He was touched by poverty, socially rejected people such as prisoners, people with mental disabilities as well as with the physical ones, lonely children or prostitutes, but yet still remained detached enough to be able to write stories about them, which eventually became novels. He pushed himself when he was writing because he wanted to satisfy all his readers and because he wanted to draw attention to these kinds of problems. Above all he perceived writing as a way how to express the emotions of working-class people whom he otherwise could not help; sometimes in a humorous way and sometimes in the way that almost bordered on horror.

The best example of this side of his could be seen on the story of little Nell from the book *The Old Curiosity Shop* and mainly on her death. When he was finishing it, he was exhausted and desperate but he wrote to his friend John Forster: "All night I have been pursued by the child; and this morning I am unrefreshed and miserable. I don't know what to do with myself. I think the close of the story will be great" and a few days later he told his illustrator "I am breaking my heart over this story, and cannot bear to finish it. I am slowly murdering that poor child, and grow wretched over it. It wrings my heart. Yet it must be" (Tomalin 114).

As a child and man, he moved around the country a lot. First he was forced to move because of his father's job's assignments and later because of his own work but he was still a true patriot. He travelled abroad but always came back with his favorite place being Kent where many of his novels take place and where he even spent his own honeymoon (Tomalin 16).

His travels to other countries such as the USA, Italy or France provided him with enough material to write other novels. Not even on his journey across America was he able to forget people rejected or neglected by the society. He visited the Asylum for the Blind, the House of Industry for the Indigent, the School for Neglected Boys, the Reformatory for Juvenile Offenders and the House of Correction for the State, and unlike the British facilities of these kinds, the American ones impressed him greatly.

The American Notes for General Circulation was published in 1842 and people both in the UK and the USA were divided into two groups ó those who accepted his opinions and those who did not. He disagreed with the concept of slaves and wasn't afraid to show it in the book where he also expressed his opinion on several other delicate topics such as rudeness, no sense of humor, vices of Americans or even Wyandot Indians, who reminded him of the gypsies back in London. He made great generalizations about the country, which may be the reason why it sold out really well but had issues to be accepted wildly. In his letter to his best friend, John Forster, he stated: "I don't like the country. I would not live here, on any consideration. It goes against the grain with me. It would with you. I think it impossible, utterly impossible, for any Englishman to live here, and be happy" (Tomalin 135).

His first published sketch was called "A Dinner at Poplar Walk" and it was published anonymously in 1833. It was nine pages long, and even in this very early work Dickens took the environment of two people of different social ranks ó the one a bachelor clerk who lives in London and the second his young, naive and cheerful cousin who lives in the suburbs with his wife and son. Dickens uses one of his greatest strong points that are to find in his work ó humor ó to picture the exact mood of the dinner they are having together and similar to the other novels the characters here are kind of absurd and mostly sympathetic. The second sketch was published few months later and in August 1834 he signed one by the name Boz and became more and more famous since.

He did not stick only to the career of a correspondent and provider of fictional stories but he also worked as the reporter. That supplied him with such experiences that influenced him deeply. His first assigned job was in the courtrooms where he worked for *Doctorø Commons*, and then he transferred to the *Mirror of Parliament*. He was fast and accurate with his reports, and he quickly deserved a reputation.

As it was said, he cared deeply about the lower classes, including children living in the streets, women doing unimaginable jobs only in order to provide for their own children, factory workers and miners, and poverty that could be seen in the streets of the cities altogether. He found out that people at these meetings were not interested in improving those living conditions, and was disgusted by them. He felt that he could draw a lot more attention to these problems by writing about them and quit his job of the reporter for the House of Commons and never came back to it. However, he was fascinated by law. The characters of lawyers appear in many of his books, same as the setting he borrowed from all the places he worked at.

His works are meant to improve society at least on a literal level when the real one was not quite possible. The Victorian period was a time when population growth was an issue ó medical care was improving and people could live longer which was among the reasons why people lived in such poverty. Dickens was aware of the fact that the reality eventually has to set in but his attempts, or maybe more like hard effort, showed his determination not let all the bad things in the world win. He said that he wanted to òshow to all, that in all familiar things, even in those which are repellent on the surface, there is Romance enough, if we will find it outö (òCharles DickensøUncollected Writings from Household Wordsö 13).

He admitted to himself that the real world cannot be changed and that his writing might only be the way for people to forget their daily trouble and have a little hope for better days. He wanted people to retain their humanity in the increasingly mechanizing world which might

have been the reason for him placing a lot of his characters to country settings or giving them rural thinking inside the cities, for example Pip in *Great Expectations* finding his peace in London after settling in Barnardø Inn reminding him his hometown Inn the Blue Boar.

His novels changed over time but it was not because he would change his view on the society but because he started to be more realistic. The features of his writing were preserved and yet a little different. After his death, his social theory was considered to be oversimplified but nowadays, those opinions have been revised (McCarthy 55).

2 TREATMENT OF CHILDREN

This chapter is focused on children and will help us understand some of Dickens's reasons for criticizing society in the way he did, and provide concrete examples from his books. Many people, experiences or things in his life had an influence on him and they were projected in his work. His criticism was focused on three main areas: family, education and the class system. People who dedicated their professional career to studying Dickens's novels came up with the conclusion that there are many special and very complex patterns there. His memories and experiences manifested themselves in his writing more than he realized. (Wilson 28).

Dickens desired to be an educated and well-respected man. Many of his characters considered this quality to be the most important part of life. David Copperfield, Oliver Twist, Pip Pirrip and many others longed to be well-educated. According to Forster, Dickens used almost the same words when describing his mother teaching him to read and David Copperfield's mother doing the same: "I faintly remember her teaching me the alphabet; and when I look upon the fat black letters in the primer, the puzzling novelty of their shapes and the easy good nature of O and S, always seem to present themselves before me as they used to do" (Tomalin 10). He believed that quality and thorough education is something every child should have the opportunity to have.

Dickens engaged himself in educational charity endeavors. One of them was setting up the committee that arranged a benefit and let children from one family to find their place in a training college. Another one of his charity actions was visiting and helping a school in Saffron Hill. This school impressed him enough to use its environment as a setting for Fagin's house in *Oliver Twist*. It was a school set up by volunteer teachers prepared to help anyone including the disabled, homeless, starving or even pupils who occasionally had spent time in

prison (Tomalin 147). Concerning America, he was amazed by the free schools in Cincinnati. He visited the boys and girls parts of the school and attended a girls reading performance. He was delighted that at least somewhere almost all children can afford to go through proper and pleasant education.

Dickens was so influenced by experiences with his father, the visits in prison and the family's financial difficulties that it was reflected in his prose – John Dickens served as a model for *David Copperfield's* character Wilkins Micawber, who shares with John among other things incarceration in debtor's prison.

In his work, Dickens did not forget to notice strange relationships between children and their "new parents", or how we would say nowadays – stepparents. This phenomenon started a very long time ago and persists to the present day. When a parent, no matter if it is a mother or a father, marries again, there is a chance that the child will not be accepted by them, or the other way around. It may be because of the novels where these children with only one parent are always accepted badly by the new one, but it seems unlikely that these new marriages achieve happiness. Dickens illustrated this problem (among others) in *David Copperfield* where David's mother marries again a few years after the death of his father, whom he never met because he died six months before he was born. Sometimes it takes time before the true nature of the relationship is revealed but in David's case it was instantly after the wedding. Firstly on his reaction when he finds out:

“Master Davy,” said Peggotty, untying her bonnet with a shaking hand, and speaking in a breathless sort of way. “What do you think? You have got a Pa!”

I trembled, and turned white. Something – I don't know what, or how – connected with the grave in the churchyard, and the raising of the dead, seemed to strike me like an unwholesome wind. (*David Copperfield* 37638)

Then it is obvious from their conversation when he asked David if he knew what he would do with an obstinate horse or dog, which itself tells enough about his relationship with little Davy a lot:

“I make him wince, and smart. I say to myself, ‘I’ll conquer that fellow; and if it were to cost him all the blood he had, I should do it. What is that upon your face?’”

“Dirt,” I said.

He knew it was the mark of tears as well as I. But if he had asked the question twenty times, each time with twenty blows, I believe my baby heart would have burst before I would have told him so.

“You have a good deal of intelligence for a little fellow,” he said, with a grave smile that belonged to him. (*David Copperfield* 40)

There may be several reasons for such treatment of stepchildren (from the point of view of their stepparents): desire to keep all the family money, fear for property, necessity to protect the bloodline, marking the territory, or just hatred and obtuseness. Dickens’s novels show that none of these reasons is enough to treat the children badly, starve them, force them to work and let them to take care of themselves and this is also one of the reasons why Dickens is sometimes called to be a visionary.

When Dickens was twelve, he worked at a shoe factory to sustain himself and to help his family with the debts that were troubling his father, and later he used this setting to portray the background of workplaces of his child heroes. Because he knew what it was like, he was shocked by the fact that children had no legal constraints against working for ten hours a day and tried to stop it: “Charles Dickens then interviews Lord Shaftesbury, champion of children's rights in parliament. His Ten Hour Act, which was at first rejected by parliament, aimed to restrict child working to ten hours a day” (“Child Labour in Victorian Times”).

The problem of child labour is not as easy to solve as it might seem. In Dickens's times many families lived under the poverty line and sending their children to work to help the family to earn some money that could be spent on food, clothes or living costs was their only option. Dickens realized that in most cases it is not the family who should be blamed but the whole system that prevailed in the society. If it wasn't the case of an abusive stepparent who forced a child to work but his loving family currently finding themselves in trouble, the child would gladly go through the adult weight of working. As an example, a situation from *A Christmas Carol* can serve: The whole Cratchit family lives very modestly and one of their sons, Tiny Tim, is very ill and might die. His brother Peter, who is not many years older, accepts the father's offer to work with joy (*A Christmas Carol* 83).

It wasn't entirely the work itself that was the worst but the conditions that accompanied it, as he illustrated in *David Copperfield* where young Davy has to work with stinking glue while sticking labels on empty bottles in not exactly optimal working conditions:

It was a crazy old house with a wharf of its own, abutting on the water when the tide was in, and on the mud when the tide was out, and literally overrun with rats. Its paneled rooms, discoloured with the dirt and smoke of a hundred years, I dare say; its decaying floors and staircase; the squeaking and scuffling of the old grey rats down in the cellars; and the dirt and rottenness of the place! (*David Copperfield* 125)

Dickens was very touched by children living in the streets. He noticed them for the first time when he walked through the forbidden quarters of London as a child. He saw that children were barefoot, mainly starved or at least underfed, with dirty streets being their playground and workplace as well. Those children were either working as messengers or sellers of minor things, or just begging or even stealing to keep themselves sustained. Dickens knew how precarious such a life was. In *Little Nell* he created the character of a girl from a

good, and stable background, her grandfather a shop-owner and her brother planning a marriage for her even though she was still young, who is then transformed into a desperate, underfed beggar on the run, ending in her inevitable death by exhaustion, depression and sickness in one of his most successful novels *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

Writing this ending for her and essentially killing her exhausted him greatly but he felt he had to do it because he wanted people to know how everyone can end up because of a few wrong decisions. Dickens was not the only one who was devastated when this emotional drama was reaching its peak. He obtained many letters from people who begged him to spare her. He still proceeded and afterwards those people felt like someone very close to them had just died. Carlyle, who had not submitted to Dickens's emotional manipulation before, was overcome with grief, and even people in New York were awaiting the ship from England with this chapter and were shouting from afar if Little Nell was dead (Dickens's Popularity).

He used his memories of those street children who he had met as a young boy as various backgrounds for his novels. We could see those experiences for instance in *Oliver Twist*, when on his long and difficult journey to London young Oliver meets the Fagin's band of specially trained street thieves for the first time, as well as on streets scenes in *Nicholas Nickleby* and *Great Expectations*, or even on the beginning of *The Old Curiosity Shop* where little Nell is sent on errands. Not only it was difficult environment for those who lived there but also for the ones who were only passing through. It could easily become a very dangerous place, especially at night, and for little Nell it wouldn't be very safe to be there if she didn't have one of those children to help her and provide her with his protection.

Not only young boys but also young girls and women worked in the streets; however their field of expertise lay somewhere else. Dickens was fully aware of the problem of prostitution. He admired the French system for recognizing this problem and was frustrated that English system was reluctant to talk about it or even to find any solution.

Later he decided to establish a house for street girls to help them to secure a decent job, and find their place in society. This institution was called A Home. It was a house for about a dozen women who either already were prostitutes or were very likely to drift into it. They were to be offered places in the Home, with good food, an orderly life, training in reading, writing, sewing, domestic work, cooking and laundering, and prepared to emigrate to new lives in the colonies, Australia, Canada or South Africa (Tomalin 205). It didn't go smoothly as over three dozen women left the country to find happiness elsewhere. Dickens's activities in this matter were not publicly known and he never wrote about these women in any of his novels to protect their privacy that he strictly respected.

Dickens respected women but there are female stereotypes in his novels. His wife Catherine was very similar to his heroines and since she was from a good family, attractive, had a gentle manner and most of all was quite different from all the other women he had known, he decided to marry her almost instantly after seeing her for the first time.

Very specific behavior was demanded of women in these times, and Dickens showed that not every woman was satisfied. It was fear that forced them to behave appropriately in most cases. They might not have been happy with the status quo but they were powerless. If they had done anything that deviated from convention, they would have been considered reckless, disrespectful and unladylike (Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain). One of Dickens's characters who belongs in this group is Clara Copperfield, Davy's mother. She was expected to be happy about her new husband's wife taking care of her domestic business but she wasn't: "It's very hard that in YOUR own house I may not have a word to say about domestic matters. I am sure I managed very well before we were married. I don't ask much. I am not unreasonable. I only want to be consulted sometimes" (*David Copperfield* 43). She was silenced by his arguments and threats, and in tears, and did not dare to say anything else:

“Clara, you surprise me! You astound me! Yes, I had a satisfaction in the thought of marrying an inexperienced and artless person, and forming her character” (David Copperfield 44)

His women characters were sometimes considered implausible, mostly because many of them tend to be “small, pretty, timid, fluttering and often suffering at the hands of their official protectors” (Tomalin 65) and could have been in most cases divided into two groups: the women with quite high social status and the street girls (or the ones who were slowly moving in the way of becoming them).

When he visited America, he enjoyed the articles written by ladies who temporarily worked in factories in Lowell for the magazine called *The Lowell Offering* that they established on their own, where the factories were mainly used as the setting and he complimentarily admitted that they were better than the similar ones he had seen back in home. Their stories included happiness of everyday life, goodness in the widest sense of the word, desire for nature and most importantly some kind of moral enrichment, which are all things that he admired. He didn’t agree with local people, who believed that this behaviour is not the appropriate kind for women: “I know no station which has a right to monopolise the means of mutual instruction, improvement, and rational entertainment; or which has ever continued to be a station very long, after seeking to do so” (*American Notes* 71).

The United States of America intrigued him enough to dedicate the whole book to writing a travelogue about it which I would like to talk about in the following chapter.

3 AMERICAN IMPRESSIONS

England was not the only target of Dickens's social criticism. This chapter deals with his observations during his travels across the United States of America, and some of his experiences that are related to them, such as prison encounters, slavery, racism, political corruption and treatment of the disabled in asylums.

Dickens's desire to travel and also his love for home was expressed in his autobiographical novel *David Copperfield*. Even little Davy was thrilled when his nanny offered him a holiday in another place, in this case Yarmouth: "I was flushed by her summary of delights, and replied that it would indeed be a treat, but what would my mother say?" (*David Copperfield* 25); he also expressed regret about leaving an important part of his life behind: "It touches me nearly now, although I tell it lightly, to recollect how eager I was to leave my happy home; to think how little I suspected what I did leave for ever" (*David Copperfield* 25). His writing crisis that he was going through in 1841 after publishing the installment with the death of Little Nell, his need for new inspiration, along with his travel passion and desire for holiday lead him to America, where he picked up a lot of material from social institutions that he later published in a form of a travelogue called the *American Notes for General Circulation*.

Dickens loved to observe people, although he hated to be observed by others (Tomalin 121). He knew both their good and bad qualities and he wasn't afraid to show the worst ones in his work. They projected not only in his fictional novels but also in his book *American Notes* that was based on his experience in the USA.

Among the immoralities he paid attention to were corruption, bribery and most of all racism. In the *American Notes* he described his experience in the New York prison called The Tombs. Besides typical cells there were also inferior ones that were in the basement and had

worse conditions. The man who guarded them, told him without any hesitation that those downstairs are only for the colored people:

“Are those black doors the cells?”

“Yes.”

“Are they all full?”

“Well, they’re pretty nigh full, and that’s a fact, and no two ways about it.”

“Those at the bottom are unwholesome, surely?”

“Why, we do only put coloured people in ‘em. That’s the truth.”

“When do the prisoners take exercise?”

“Well, they do without it pretty much.” (*American Notes* 85-86)

Dickens was shocked when he found out that African-Americans didn’t have any legal support. The so-called public opinion which was something people there were always referring to was that slaves are mostly grateful and dedicated to their masters, and that it is in every master’s good interest not to treat their slaves badly in order to retain their market value. Dickens was disgusted by this blaming of others and not making any change or taking responsibility.

Why, public opinion in the slave States IS slavery, is it not? Public opinion, in the slave States, has delivered the slaves over, to the gentle mercies of their masters. Public opinion has made the laws, and denied the slaves legislative protection. Public opinion has knotted the lash, heated the branding iron, loaded the rifle, and shielded the murderer. Public opinion threatens the abolitionist with death, if he venture to the South. (*American Notes* 234)

Nevertheless, the reality was quite different from this, and basically the slave-owners could do whatever they found pleasant:

Among the other blessings which public opinion secures to the negroes, is the common practice of violently punching out their teeth. To make them wear iron collars by day and night, and to worry them with dogs, are practices almost too ordinary to deserve mention. (*American Notes* 238)

The abolition of slavery in America didn't take place until after the Civil war, which was over twenty years after Dickens's visit there. When he visited, it was a normal part of life. In his days, it appeared in America on everyday basis, but it didn't mean that anyone would want him to write these kinds of things in his book and speak about them so openly not just in America but also across the Atlantic Ocean, in Europe. The *New York Courier and Enquirer* even published an article which was full of anger, disbelief and swearing to Dickens's address. Its main idea was to express Dickens's unwillingness to try to understand America and his effort to make himself look better in front of English writers and to make as much money by publishing this travelogue as possible: "We are mortified and grieved that he should have been guilty of such great indelicacy and impropriety." The entire press of the Union was predisposed to be his eulogist, but he urged those assembled (not just to) do honour to his genius, but to look after his purse also ("When Charles Dickens fell out with America"). Even his friend from Boston, Edgar Allan Poe, stated that the *American Notes* were "one of the most suicidal productions, ever deliberately published by an author, who had the least reputation to lose" (Tomalin 141).

He did not forget to mention a quotation from "The Declaration of Independence": "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness" ("The Declaration of Independence"). He called slavery "the most hideous blot and foul disgrace" (*American Notes* 28), and his descriptions of the worst parts of the city, where "colored people" lived in such horrible conditions, did not help the

reception of the book in the USA, although Liberal Americans and abolitionists agreed with his stance towards slavery.

The floor is covered with heaps of negro women, waking from their sleep: their white teeth chattering, and their bright eyes glistening and winking on all sides with surprise and fear, like the countless repetition of one astonished African face in some strange mirror! Where dogs would howl to lie, women, and men, and boys slink off to sleep, forcing the dislodged rats to move away in quest of better lodgings. (*American Notes* 92)

In the *American Notes*, he also dealt with political corruption. The first case is the answer for Dickens's question whether the prisoners can be released sometimes: "Why yes, that I do it sometimes. Political friends I do it sometimes. It's pretty often done, one way or another" (*American Notes* 79). The second is Dickens's reaction to the Lunatic Asylum he visited in New York and which, unlike Boston, deeply disgusted him:

Will it be believed that the governor of such a house as this, is appointed, and deposed, and changed perpetually, as Parties fluctuate and vary, and as their despicable weathercocks are blown this way or that? A hundred times in every week, some new most paltry exhibition of that narrow-minded and injurious Party Spirit, which is the Simoom of America, sickening and blighting everything of wholesome life within its reach, was forced upon my notice; but I never turned my back upon it with feelings of such deep disgust and measureless contempt, as when I crossed the threshold of this madhouse. (*American Notes* 96)

With all his experiences from America, Dickens came to the conclusion that politicians were only a reflection of the American people, and that they were motivated not by ideals but by money ("When Charles Dickens fell out with America").

But Dickens was also intrigued by generosity, unselfishness and kindness of some of the locals. He visited asylums for the blind, neglected boys, mentally ill or otherwise disabled people both in England and in America. He admired the staff of these places for the good care they took of the residents. He, like those physicians, believed that even if people are blind, deaf and dumb or even mad, they deserve a chance to live like anyone else. In one of the hospitals in South Boston, they even allowed the patients the run of the facility, and that was something Dickens considered very clever. As one of the nurses said: "Evince a desire to show some confidence, and repose some trust, even in mad people" (*American Notes* 47).

Not only in his novels but also in *American Notes* Dickens expressed his disgust about criminal's justification. According to him, every villain deserved punishment, however without any public exaggerations or fame.

I incline as little to the sickly feeling which makes every canting lie or maudlin speech of a notorious criminal a subject of newspaper report and general sympathy, as I do to those good old customs of the good old times which made England, even so recently as in the reign of the Third King George, in respect of her criminal code and her prison regulations, one of the most bloody-minded and barbarous countries on the earth. (*American Notes* 53-54)

The prison systems in America and England were very different. Each of them had its advantages and disadvantages and both of them could definitely be much improved as they were not as effective as they should have been.

At the same time I know, as all men do or should, that the subject of Prison Discipline is one of the highest importance to any community; and that in her sweeping reform and bright example to other countries on this head, America has shown great wisdom, great benevolence, and exalted policy. In contrasting

her system with that which we have modelled upon it, I merely seek to show that with all its drawbacks, ours has some advantages of its own. (*American Notes* 54)

Dickens visited many prisons while travelling across America. He regarded Boston prisons to be much better constructed than the ones in England: "The whole of this arrangement struck me as being admirable; and I hope that the next new prison we erect in England may be built on this plan" (*American Notes* 55). Prisoners here were allowed to work together, although with no talking to one another, they received a warm meal regularly and each of them had their own clean cell with a bed. On the contrary, prisons in Philadelphia he found absolutely purposeless, devastating, torturing and without chances for improvement or rectification of prisoners. He was horrified by his visit there and by the fact that prisoners, kept in dark cells, weren't allowed to do anything – no work, no visits, no exercise. They were just slowly withering and losing their minds. The image of this particular prison was permanently imprinted into Dickens's memory.

Wilson says that there is a special feature about the way Dickens created the fictional scenes where English criminals are trying to get away from the country. He says that Dickens describes these actions in such detail that he must have written it according to personal experiences that he had heard recounted (23). Among those scenes are for instance the ones with Jonas Chuzzlewit boarding the ship to the Netherlands in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which he wrote after coming back from the America, or with Magwitch boarding the ship to gain his freedom in *Great Expectations*. Especially in his early novels, Dickens underlined that families were ashamed or felt threatened if someone in their family had committed a crime. This modus operandi that he used in most of his books probably originated in his childhood and in the story of his grandfather, who had fled over the sea. The influence of this experience

was fading as he was getting older because it isn't as much obvious in his later novels (Wilson 22).

Another of his concerns was Native-Americans. He was shocked when he saw the treaties concluded between white settlers and Native Americans. He correctly suspected that they had no idea what they were signing with the pictures representing their native names and wondered how many times did they do that before they learned to break their promises from the white men (*American Notes* 147).

From his conversations with people there that he enjoyed describing into great detail, one of America's most precious values rises to the surface – patriotism and the desire to defend their country. Among those men who opened their hearts to Dickens and acknowledged that they would want to move around and fight for their homeland was also one man from the West:

He was one of the very many descendants of Cain proper to this continent, who seem destined from their birth to serve as pioneers in the great human army: who gladly go on from year to year extending its outposts, and leaving home after home behind them; and die at last, utterly regardless of their graves being left thousands of miles behind, by the wandering generation who succeed. (*American Notes* 190)

While in America, he even visited the US Military Academy at West Point, and regarded it as very efficient: "The course of education is severe, but well devised, and manly" (*American Notes* 223). Once he met a group of soldiers with one novice and witnessed something he considered very loyal and good, and which corresponded with the notion he had of the army men in America. The soldiers were laughing at the novice because he was drunk, but when he fell overboard before their eyes, they helped him immediately. This experience

showed that people in America are not all that bad how it might seem from reading first chapters of his book.

I never saw such a good thing as the change that came over these soldiers in an instant. Almost before the man was down, their professional manner, their stiffness and constraint, were gone, and they were filled with the most violent energy. In less time than is required to tell it, they had him out again... But the moment they set him upright and found that he was none the worse, they were soldiers again, looking over their glazed stocks more composedly than ever. (*American Notes* 209)

In spite of his honest and direct descriptions and judgments in the book, he kept most of his negative opinions and disappointments to himself and expressed them only in his letters to his friends, one of them being John Forster as I wrote in the first chapter, and the other one being William Macready, whom he wrote: "I am disappointed! This is not the republic of my imagination" ("When Charles Dickens fell out with America"). Nevertheless, he stated that he didn't want to modify any habits observed to ones he was used to from England. He realized that he wasn't home, and that the people couldn't be the same. On the other hand he acknowledged that if he had been in England, he would have been deeply offended by such behaviour.

American Notes for General Circulation wasn't the only book that Dickens published after returning to his beloved England. More of his observations from the travels he satirized in his next book called *Martin Chuzzlewit*, which explored American vices in details: violence, greedy and graceless eating, spitting tobacco and also slavery and hypocrisy about supposed equality (Tomalin 141). Dickens used this novel to take his revenge on all the papers that were very harsh on him and which, additionally, were running his novels in installments without his approval, in other words, they stole his copyrights, although legally it

was alright because America didn't have laws against foreign copyrights yet. Probably because of the grudge presented in this book, it didn't sell well in England, but Dickens had his revenge (Dickens vs. America).

Mercier believes that Dickens probably went through some traumatizing experience while visiting America, which changed his perception of the world: "He became less radical, less optimistic, and he downgraded his view of human nature" ("When Charles Dickens fell out with America"). This was also the biggest milestone in his writing. That is the reason why his later novels differ so much from the early ones. "His early novels expose isolated abuses and shortcomings of individual people, whereas his later novels contain a bitter diagnosis of the Condition of England" ("Charles Dickens as Social Commentator and Critic").

Despite the fact that he lost several American friends because of the *American Notes*, the people there were eventually able to overcome their negative feelings and admitted once again that Dickens was a great writer whose novels deserved to be appreciated.

Generally speaking, Dickens focused on different social issues in America than in England. It is not true that America wouldn't deal with problems like England had, such as child labour, poverty, or greed resulting in the ill-treatment of children. It just had considerably bigger issues that he needed to pay attention to, and that's why the *American Notes* are focused on matters specific to this country, such as slavery, bribery and imprisonment, and also things he found admirable, such as patriotism and kindness connected to taking care of the disabled.

4 CALLING FOR A CHANGE

This chapter deals with Dickens's vision of how the world might be if people could learn from their mistakes and listen to and understand others from different social levels. Dickens expressed this hope in his later novels where he criticized British society as a whole, not just individuals, even though that is still present as well. His belief was based on the idea that first individuals have to change so then big changes can follow.

Karl Marx, the founder of the first International Workingmen's Association in London in 1864, wrote of Dickens that he "issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together" ("Charles Dickens and the Street Children of London"). Marx's analysis confirmed Dickens's intuition about the social conditions of his time. Unlike Marx, whose analysis led eventually to revolutionary movements in the twentieth century, Dickens favoured more peaceful way of social change, and illustrated that in *A Tale of Two Cities* where he condemned the revolution in France.

Two of his novels that were criticized working conditions of the lower class in London were *A Christmas Carol* with its follow-up *The Chimes*. They both were Christmas books. When Ebenezer Scrooge is pulled out of bed, he is a very unpleasant, abrasive, rude and mean man, but when the Spirits show him some of the lives of people who have worse living conditions, he reconsiders his opinion and approach and changes himself. He contributes to the charities he had previously turned down, he changes his behavior and he gets to live. Using this particular case, Dickens showed that society cannot change until the people who actually have the power to do something about it see what they are (and most often on purpose) overlooking. The two main defects Dickens is criticizing in this novel reveal themselves in the end of the confrontation with the second Spirit as he shows Scrooge two

little children from underneath his robe who look ōwretched, abject, frightful, hideous, miserableö (A *Christmas Carol* 98):

ōSpirit, are they yours.ö Scrooge could say no more.

ōThey are Manø,ö said the Spirit, looking down upon them. ōAnd they cling to me, appealing from their fathers. This boy is Ignorance. This girl is Want. Beware them both, and all of their degree, but most of all beware this boy, for on his brow I see that written which is Doom, unless the writing be erased.ö (A *Christmas Carol* 99)

Dickens didn't hold back when describing people's desire for money, prestige or even revenge. We can see it not only throughout *A Christmas Carol* story which is about greed but also in the people chasing young Oliver, who was unjustly accused of stealing, in *Oliver Twist*, or on the character of a schoolmaster Squeers in *Nicholas Nickleby* who runs the school for children. This person is a character whose negative qualities dominates the positive ones; his love for family can be counted as good because the children he is supposed to take care of are suffering exactly for him and his family can afford to live better. Through the character of Nicholas, who is sent to this school as a teacher, Dickens expressed his own disgust at those children's treatment:

Pale and haggard faces, lank and bony figures, children with the countenances of old men, deformities with irons upon their limbs, boys of stunted growth, and others whose long meagre legs would hardly bear their stooping bodies, all crowded on the view together! With every kindly sympathy and affection blasted in its birth, with every young and healthy feeling flogged and starved down, with every revengeful passion that can fester in swollen hearts, eating its evil way to their core in silence, what an incipient Hell was breeding here! (*Nicholas Nickleby* 92-93)

This schoolmaster character is among others who served Dickens as a way of criticizing British school system which was based on getting profit for pupils without enriching them with much useful knowledge by using means that weren't pleasant for them. Another example is David Copperfield's experiences, along with his schoolmates, of Mr. Creakle in the school. One of the themes of *Hard Times* is the realization that rationalism and education are significantly more important than emotions and imagination. These matters are to be compared only to explain how different people think and subsequently behave; their approaches to life and their priorities which consequently lead to social stratification.

–If you please, sir, I am very fond of flowers, returned the girl.

–But you mustn't fancy, cried the gentleman, quite elated by coming so happily to his point. –That's it! You are never to fancy. –You are not, Cecilia Jupe, Thomas Gradgrind solemnly repeated, –to do anything of that kind. –Fact, fact, fact! said the gentleman. (*Hard Times* 10)

In *Hard Times* Dickens explained the situation that arose due to the Industrial Revolution and the new movements that dominated the society, such as not only rationalism and important approach towards education and facts, but also materialism, acquisitiveness, and extremely competitive capitalist economics. Even the main town where the book is set bears signs that can serve as a metaphor for this period:

Coketown, the city of Fact, foreshadows the emergence of a monstrous mass urban society based on rationalism, anonymity, dehumanisation. The dominant feature of the town is its inherent ugliness. Its inhabitants lack individuality and are the product of an inhuman, materialistic society. (öCharles Dickens as Social Commentator and Criticö)

Dickens followed the work of Frederick Engels and Thomas Carlyle who were at the time the only ones who paid attention to this problem in their publications. Those three men had

this one thing in common ó They ÷were all fired with anger and horror at the indifference of the rich to the fate of the poor, who had almost no access to education, no care in sickness, saw their young children set to work for ruthless factory-owners and could consider themselves lucky if they were only half starvedö (Tomalin 149).

The Industrial Revolution on the one hand very much needed change, but on the other it caused people to move from villages to cities which quickly became overcrowded and hunger and diseases progressed incredibly easily. Dickens addressed the problem of excessive population growth in *A Christmas Carol*, using rather sharp declaration through the Scrooge character: If they would rather die, they had better do it, and decrease the surplus population (*A Christmas Carol* 13). The demand for work severely prevailed over the supply and the wages kept dropping. The rich were happy and couldn't understand why poor people wouldn't rather work than to be destitute, and the poor could not work even if they wanted to.

öWork. Don't make fine play-acting speeches about bread, but earn it.ö

öHow?ö cried the other. öWhere? Show me the means. Will you give them to meö will you?ö (*Nicholas Nickleby* 563)

If people were eventually lucky enough to find some work, they voluntarily entered horrible factories, woolen mills, the coal mines, or the cotton mills in order to survive, and worked there in horrendous conditions. There was no law to ensure the healthy standards, nor any that would keep children from working as well. It lasted a long time till passed a law that forbade women and people under 21 years of age to work at night, or did not allow children to work more than nine hours a day. The life of the working class was improving, but it was very slow process (Williamson).

Hard Times is not set in London like most of Dickens's novels, but in a small coal factory village that provides employment for many local people, and shows the conditions of the working class.

Look how we live, an wheer we live, an in what numbers, an by what chances, an wiø what sameness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to ony disøant object- ceptin awlus, Death. Look how you considers of us, an writes of us, an talks of us, and goes up wiø yor deputations to Secretaries øø State -bout us, and how yo are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never hadøn no reason in us sin ever we were born. Look how this ha growen and growen, sir, bigger an bigger, broader an broader, harder an harder, fro year to year, fro generation unto generation. (*Hard Times* 122-123)

The novel combines exceptional drama with social criticism and was his most successful novel, written in reaction to experiences with the working class of London. This work is been used as a prime example of British social criticism even nowadays, and also influenced other visionaries, such as George Orwell who, like Dickens, was dedicated to fighting against social injustice and totalitarianism, and defending democratic approaches (øHard Times: Dickens and Social Critiqueö).

Dickens uses examples which help us to understand what exactly he considers to be wrong; for instance the school scenes in *Hard Times*, or Scroogeø's visit at Cratchitø's home in *A Christmas Carol*. Considering that in *Hard Times* he portrays school in great detail with one particular situation that not only helps us grasp the ideology of those times but also presents the central problem of educational institutions, and that he merely describes the factories without any specific situations inside them, his point is more or less clear: change is desperately needed in educational institutions (McCarthy).

Dickensø's style of writing in *Hard Times* is allegorical. All of his characters, places, scenes or dialogues have a precisely determined purpose and symbolism within themselves; for example the environment of circus serves as a metaphor for freedom, humanity and

happiness; the city represents a jungle with factories as mad elephants, children as little vessels that need to be filled and smoke as cruel serpents crawling all around. The other novel where he criticized society approach, *A Christmas Carol*, is also written in an allegorical style with all elements having purpose and meaning. For instance each of the three main characters represent something relating to the point Dickens is making: Scrooge represents the greedy and rich upper class as well as everything that stands against Christmas; Cratchit represents all the poor people of England suffering under the rich; and Fred is there as a reminder of all the positive, happy, enthusiastic and simply good things that should people be able to feel and enjoy during Christmas (öCharles Dickens as Social Commentator and Criticö).

Nevertheless, *Hard Times* is not a book that encourages revolt against the status quo. He recognizes that the change that Industrial Revolution brought is good and that it pushed the nation to another level of development. On the contrary, he argues that people who are in charge and have power must change. It is their immoral and inaccurate management that causes all the trouble in society (McCarthy 45). On the other hand, he believed that keeping one's humanity and also imagination and joy was essential in order to survive in the world that was becoming more and more mechanical.

Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's-eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of ornament; or, in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you. (*Hard Times* 133)

It might seem that in comparison with his previous novels his perception of society changed but in fact it became more realistic. The characters are still not believable people, they are either good or bad, but their behaviour is more understandable and their motivation are not as clear as of those in his previous books. For instance Gradgrind from *Hard Times* or Dombey from *Dombey and Son*, which is another of his later novels, act without any apparent initiative and that way they are also more plausible as true human beings with hidden motives and agenda (McCarthy 48). Another characteristic of this particular novel that can be considered the dividing line between his earlier, more optimistic novels, and his later, darker work, is the lack of happy ending. Just as the main character Stephen, who is clearly one of the good ones, dies, just as the fate of Little Dorrit, a character from his next novel of the same name, cannot be considered a happy end either.

All in all, Dickens doesn't criticize the basic social approaches but the people who stand as their leaders and are motivated mostly by the negative qualities and aims.

CONCLUSION

Charles Dickens used his literary gift to draw the attention to the most hideous problems that were more-or-less publicly taboo at his time. Through his fictional characters he explained how he felt and what he considered wrong and that is the reason why his work was so popular among the lower classes.

The thesis deals with his novels where he presented social issues. While his early novels focus on the vices of individual people, his later novels are darker and criticize the whole society. The negative qualities often prevail over the positive ones with many people, and Dickens realized gradual amelioration, not revolutionary change, was society's best hope.

Dickens's experiences from his visits in prisons, asylums, schools and even streets, were used for his novels, changing both him and his readers in the process. His popularity with people was so great that when he died a little girl was said to have cried "Dickens dead? Then will Father Christmas die too?" ("Dickens's Popularity").

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abrams, Lynn. "Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain." Web. 9 August 2001. Bbc.co.uk.

Allen, Walter. "Hard Times: Dickens and Social Critique." From *The English Novel: A Short Critical History*, New York: Dutton, 1958. Web. Academicsecrets.com.

"Child Labour in Victorian Times." Web. Bbc.co.uk.

Cody, David. "Dickens's Popularity." Web. 8 June 2007. Victorianweb.org.

Crotch, W. Walter. *Charles Dickens, Social Reformer*. London: Chapman and Hall, 1913.

Dickens, Charles. *A Christmas Carol*. PDF file. 12 March 2013.

<http://www.planetpdf.com/planetpdf/pdfs/free_ebooks/a_christmas_carol_t.pdf>

---. *American Notes for General Circulation*. 1997. PDF file. 18 February 2013.

<<http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/dickens/AmericanNotes6x9.pdf>>

---. *David Copperfield*. 1996. PDF file. 19 February 2013.

<<http://ebookbrowse.com/gdoc.php?id=384020804&url=b684204f8318dfbb842ed7d4f33afb5c>>

---. *Great Expectations*. London: Penguin, 2003. Print.

---. *Hard Times*. PDF file. 24 March 2013.

<<http://pinkmonkey.com/dl/library1/dic04.pdf>>

---. *Nicholas Nickleby*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

---. *Oliver Twist*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1992. Print.

---. *Sketches by Boz*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. Print.

---. *The Old Curiosity Shop*. Ware: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1994. Print.

Diniejkö, Andrzej. ŒCharles Dickens as Social Commentator and Criticö. Warsaw University in Poland. 7 February 2012. Web. Victorianweb.org.

Leavis, F.R., and Leavis, Q.D. *Dickens the Novelist*. London: Chatoo and Windus, 1970.

McCarthy, V. Christine, ŒThe Social Criticism of Charles Dickens: A Point of Viewö (1971). *Open Access Dissertations and Theses*. Paper 4952.

Orwell, George. *Critical Essays*. London: Stecker and Warburg, 1946.

Pearl, Matthew. ŒDickens vs. Americaö. Web. Moreintelligentlife.com.

Stone, Harry, ed., ŒCharles Dickensø Uncollected Writings from Household Wordsö, Bloomington, 1968.

Tomalin, Claire. *Charles Dickens: A Life*. London: Penguin, 2012. Print.

Warren, Andrea. ŒCharles Dickens and the Street Children of Londonö. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2011. Web. Andreawarren.com.

ŒWhen Charles Dickens fell out with Americaö. 14 February 2012. Web. Bbc.co.uk.

Williamson, Jeffrey. *Did British Capitalism Breed Inequality?* Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1985. Print.

Wilson, Angus: *Sv t Charlese Dickense*. Praha: Odeon, 1979. Print.

SUMMARY IN CZECH

Tato bakalářská práce se zabývá Charlesem Dickensem a jeho zájmem o sociální problémy viktoriánské doby. Práce analyzuje některá jeho díla, za jejichž pomoci osvětluje jeho přesvědčení. Mezi ně patří *David Copperfield*, *Americké poznámky*, *Oliver Twist*, *Vánoční koleda*, *Mikuláš–Nickleby* a *Zléасы*.

První kapitola poskytuje informace týkající se Charlese Dickense, a to z hlediska pohledu sociálního kriticismu, založené na poslední Dickensově bibliografii od Claire Tomalin.

Druhá kapitola se zabývá jeho zájmem o způsob zacházení s dětmi, o práci dětí a vztahy mezi dětmi a jejich nevlastními rodiči; dále pak problémem pouličních dětí, dalšími dětskými postavami v jeho díle i tím, jak na ně viktoriánská společnost pohlížela.

Třetí kapitola sleduje jeho cesty po Americe a jeho pozorování z amerických věznic, ústavů a vzdělávacích institucí, stejně jako jeho názory na otroctví.

Poslední kapitola se zabývá chudobou, změnami, které se na společnosti promítly po zátce pro myšlové revoluce, a Dickensovými soudy ohledně jedinců i celé společnosti.